

PRESS RELEASE

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY



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STATE HEALTH OFFICIALS PROMOTE HEALTH COVERAGE PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN

EAST LOS ANGELES – State health officials joined local children and families at the Beverly WIC Center today to urge parents to sign up their children for free or low-cost health coverage available through state and county programs.

More than 428,000 uninsured children—about half of whom are Latino—are already eligible for free or low-cost coverage through Medi-Cal and Healthy Families. In addition, more than 10,000 children are on waiting lists for county-based programs. Officials are holding events this week to raise awareness of these programs and educate parents about how to enroll.

"Our goal is to reach out to the thousands of California families who are eligible for free or low-cost health coverage for their children but have not enrolled," said Sandra Shewry, director of the California Department of Health Services.

"Existing programs like Medi-Cal, Healthy Families and county children's health initiatives provide access to a comprehensive scope of services," Shewry said. "More than half of all uninsured children are eligible for Medi-Cal or Healthy Families. By expanding our outreach, we can help more children get access to the health care services they need and reduce the number of uninsured Californians."

As part of their efforts, state officials are encouraging parents to call the toll-free number (888) 747-1222, to get more information about both Medi-Cal and Healthy Families.

"Children with access to health care are more successful in school and in life," Shewry said. "Educating parents about Medi-Cal, Healthy Families and county-based health programs is an important step toward improving the health and well-being of California's children."

During the state budget crisis earlier in this decade, outreach efforts for Medi-Cal and Healthy Families were cut back dramatically. As a result, some parents may not be aware of the opportunity to obtain free or low-cost health coverage. A November 2005 study by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research found that when parents of eligible children were asked why they had not enrolled, nearly half either didn't know about the programs or didn't know their child was eligible.

The problem of children who are eligible but not enrolled is particularly acute among Latinos. The UCLA study found that Medi-Cal-eligible children whose parents speak only Spanish at home are far more likely not to be enrolled than children from English-speaking families.

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This year, Governor Schwarzenegger is proposing new targeted investments of more than \$100 million to maximize enrollment in Healthy Families and Medi-Cal, increase the number of eligible children who stay enrolled and support county-based efforts to enroll children in existing public programs. These investments build upon the \$15 million for outreach and enrollment activities included in the Governor's 2005-06 budget.

Specific investments proposed by the Governor for 2006-07 include:

- \$23 million to support the efforts of existing county-based children's health initiatives to enroll uninsured 6- to 18-year-old children with family income up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level who are ineligible for state programs.
- \$20.9 million to counties for outreach and enrollment activities that build on local efforts to enroll eligible children, with a focus on underserved communities.
- \$3.4 million for a public information campaign to promote awareness of Medi-Cal and Healthy Families, emphasize the importance of health care coverage to a child's health and encourage parents to enroll their children.
- \$4.4 million to increase payments to Certified Application Assistants, specialists who help families apply for health coverage. These funds will support increased performance-based incentives to Certified Application Assistants for filing successful applications using the electronic Health-E-App and for assisting with annual eligibility re-determinations.

Since Governor Schwarzenegger took office, children's enrollment in Healthy Families and Medi-Cal has increased. These programs now serve more than four million children, including nearly 1.2 million Latino children. Despite challenges resulting from the aftereffects of the state budget crisis, the 2005-06 budget increased overall health care spending by more than \$1 billion. The Governor's proposed 2006-07 budget builds upon last year's investment through a proposed increase of \$2.3 billion in health and human services funding.

Governor Schwarzenegger has also obtained federal approval of an innovative pilot program that enabled four counties to access federal money to expand health care coverage to an estimated 3,000 more low-income children through Healthy Families. He has also supported the translation of the Healthy Families Web site to Spanish (<http://www.healthyfamilies.ca.gov/hf/hfhomeSPN.jsp>) in 2004, thereby allowing Spanish-speaking families access to important education and enrollment materials.

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